

## SPEAK!

*“Before men....”*

*Luke 12:8*

During the weeks that precede your making confession and on the day it is to occur, Satan often whispers this thought into the heart of the believer: “Why make a public confession; is religion not a matter of the heart, an affair between my heart and the eternal love for whom it aches and to whom it extends itself in prayer?” That is a typical Satanic suggestion, a suggestion that is especially tempting because it contains some truth. Religion is indeed a matter of the heart. The man for whom it is not that is still foreign to the first rudiments of true religion. An illustration will help you indicate that: You can hang a gorgeous picture of the rising sun in your room, but that does not make your room comfortably warm. Similarly, spring has not necessarily dawned in your heart just because you happen to have a beautiful conception of the Christ and of his things.

Inner intensity, ardor of conviction, the sparkle of faith in your heart—these are the things that matter. It is a lack of these qualities that causes so much sham religion. Who knows how much more strongly and beautifully the power of Christ upon earth would come to expression if the “burning fire shut up in my bones” of which Jeremiah speaks would only burn more ardently in those who confess him?

Religion is a matter of the heart. The man who in his religion attends often to what people say and think and seldom to what God demands may be one of religious throngs, but he possesses no spiritual strength. Because darkness envelops his soul, he can give others no light; because there are only cinders and ashes in the hearth of his feelings, he can give no warmth to others. One loathes such pseudo piety and reverences only the religion of the man who can testify with a sparkle of conviction in his eye: “I believe, and therefore have I spoken.”

During the period immediately preceding your being received into the church you see many and more running to make their confession. They are people in whose heart the world rules, and in whose feeling egotism reigns. It is no wonder that you are then painfully affected

by this conspicuous lack of heartfelt fervor; no wonder that the whole process seems to have a machine-like precision about it that betrays a lack of sincerity. Although you were on your way with those many to make the confession it is no wonder that in a pious moment, you stopped, thinking: "Not so, surely. Religion must be a heartfelt matter. I will confess before God, but not before men."

In a sense it is true that the better qualities of your heart came to expression in that moment. Yet it was Satan who suggested the words "But not before men." You know that Satan is always controverting Jesus' words, and Jesus, far from discouraging a continual confession among men, has specifically laid that task upon your shoulders as a binding duty. You remember his words: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God."

The issue, therefore, is clearly delineated: either you confess the Christ or you deny him. Jesus recognized no third possibility. He never spoke of a neutral sphere in which you could remain noncommittal in your attitude toward him. It is a matter of pro or con, of a savor of life or a savor of death. You confess or you deny, and you confess or deny before men.

Do not your alms before men. Otherwise you will have no reward. Let your soul flow out in prayer toward God, but do so only after you have closed the door of your inner room. And when you pray, pray the Father in spirit and in truth, for the kingdom comes not in external form, but is within you. True, all these emphases—very true. But they do not release you from the responsibility of confessing your Jesus before men. Remember that by not confessing him, you are denying him before men.

Confess him with propriety: not crudely, and not on uncouth occasions. A shyness in the presence of holy things is always desirable. You may not cast pearls before swine. The prudent will know the occasion. Never keep silence or accustom yourself to reticence. You must speak out for the Christ. He who does not do so, or who is loathe to do so because of embarrassment, becomes guilty of denying his Savior.

It is a sin to be reticent over against the Christ; it is cowardice; it betrays a want of ardor, of love, of zeal of one's Lord. One can conclude that from daily experience. If someone happens to count a prominent person among his relatives, he always takes delight in telling his

associates that the man is his relative and friend. But if the relative happens to be one whose reputation is tainted or who has been singularly unfortunate, one prefers to act as though the man were no relative at all. That represents a sinful tendency, but sinful man is nevertheless so inclined. How we like to champion a man when the championing gets us honor; and how we like to conceal all relationships that do not flatter us! Jesus appeals to this characteristic of human nature when he asks that you confess him. He seems to be saying to you: "It gets me no praise among the angels of God; yet I am not ashamed to be called your brother. Hence I ask that you be unashamed of me also, although I know the world will despise you for defending my cause."

Note that the expression "before men" means before all men. Hence you must do more than to confess him as do they who defend the Christ in the company of their inferiors, but who fear to do so in the presence of people more eminent than they. But Jesus did not recognize the courage that waxes heroic before inferiors and dwindles into cowardice before those who are superior to us. He asked that we confess him before all men—before kings, governors, and priests, also priests of science. He himself gave us the example. He made the good confession not only among the fisher folk of Capernaum and the farmers of Galilee, but just as boldly and heroically before the procurator appointed by Caesar of Rome. The Jesus of Nazareth is the same as the Jesus of Jerusalem.

He demands therefore that you esteem him highly, that you love him so much and cling to him so inseparably that you deny him before none, but courageously, faithfully, and boldly confess him before men of every rank and position. That kind of confession will cause you many inconveniences. Many will avoid you because of it. It may cause divisions between you and your acquaintances, between you and your friends and relatives. But Jesus sacrificed all these things and more. He suffered blasphemy, scourging, the awful anguish of Gethsemane, and finally the cruel death upon the cross. Almost peacefully, but with determined courage, he persisted. In fact, he told you that he came to introduce divisions upon earth, to put schism between a man and his friends, between a man and his relatives. Concerning that schism He himself testified that it would sometimes result in separation between even a parent and a child.

One can safely say therefore that it is an unfavorable symptom if someone has reached a considerable age without ever having broken an association because of his confession of Jesus. Beware if all men speak well of you. Their speaking thus suggests that little of your confession reached them, and that you preferred to deny your Savior.

Do not deceive yourself. Your religion must be a matter of ardent, heartfelt conviction. It may not represent a mere display before men, but must profoundly affect your soul's relationship to God. If your religion is merely ostentation and display, you worship illusion, and there is no life within you.

However, you may not go to the other extreme. Never may you propose to let your religion be your own, that it is not the business of other people. A believer cannot maintain silence; he must express himself. As often as that expression of his conviction meets with opposition, he is confessing his Lord.